

The MARRIAGE IS A SACRAMENT Series

School of Theology at Claremont



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# Growing Together in Spirit



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# Growing Together in Spirit

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shops' Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices  
National Conference of Catholic Bishops

In its 1987 planning document, as approved by the general membership of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in November 1986, the Bishops' Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices was authorized to continue the preparation of a publication that would address the Church's call to those involved with marriage preparation. The final text was reviewed by the members of the Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices and was approved by the NCCB Administrative Committee in September 1988. *Growing Together in Spirit* is excerpted from that book *Faithful to Each Other Forever: A Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation* and is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Monsignor Robert N. Lynch  
General Secretary  
NCCB/USCC

May 7, 1990

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ISBN 1-55586-353-1

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## Marriage Is a Sacrament

Over the many centuries before the Word of God became flesh and lived among us, men and women were constantly matching up with each other, through diverse procedures, and entering into marriage. Christ did not establish the married state.

But Jesus did grace a wedding with his presence; he spoke words of wisdom about marriage and elevated matrimony to a lofty status. He performed his first miracle during the nuptial celebration at Cana in Galilee, indicating—according to the judgment of many—by that action his unique interest in and blessing upon marriage.<sup>1</sup> He made specific comments about the ideal of oneness between husband and wife, stressed the unbreakability of the marital bond, and sharply challenged the prevailing view in his time about the permissibility of divorce.<sup>2</sup> He raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament so that it might more clearly recall and more easily reflect his own unbreakable union with his Church. In that fashion, Christ helped and helps spouses to assist one another in attaining holiness within their married life.<sup>3</sup>

In our own time, the Church is being blessed with a vital awareness of the married state as a specially graced fulfillment of the Christian's baptismal vocation. Both the teaching of the Church and the experience of married Catholics are shedding a new light of faith on the fundamental community of life and love, which is the heart of marriage.

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1. Jn 2:1-11.

2. Lk 16:18; Mk 10:2-12; Mt 5:31-32, 19:3-9.

3. "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," in *Vatican Council II*, art. 11.  
See also, *Rite of Marriage*, Introduction, no. 2.

In other sacraments, generally, clergy minister the sacrament and do so with words, gestures, and material elements such as water at baptism or bread and wine for the Eucharist. However, in matrimony, the bride and groom minister the sacrament to one another, the clergy simply serve as the Church's witness.

Moreover, the essential element is not the pouring of water with accompanying words or the proclamation of a formula over bread and wine, but the matrimonial consent between baptized persons. By that exchange of promises, a man and a woman, through irrevocable consent, give and accept each other in a partnership designed both for the good of the spouses through their close, special unity and for the procreation and education of offspring.<sup>4</sup>

The sacrament, then, is the mutual and irreversible commitment and the living out of that commitment for life. That means that Christ becomes present, through grace, in a newer and deeper way at the moment of the exchange itself. It also implies that Jesus will continue to be present in a unique and ever-deepening manner whenever the husband and wife carry out those mutual marital promises. It is often in the ordinary, daily events of work, conversation, recreation, and prayer that a couple, out of good will and loving care, strengthen their bond of commitment or fidelity and become more fully one. In so doing, they live out what might be called their matrimonial "spiritual exercises." Finally, the sacramental nature of matrimony likewise suggests that the couple can count on particular actual graces from time to time that will assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities "in good times and in bad, in sickness, and in health."<sup>5</sup>

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4. The revised *Code of Canon Law*, promulgated by John Paul II on January 25, 1983 (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), cc. 1055-1057.

5. *Rite of Marriage*, nos. 3, 25.

A married couple can move from the experience of their own loving relationship and those similar relationships within their family to a better awareness of God and Christ's love for us, God's people, the Church. Thus, every time they love and care for one another, respect and serve each other, enter into a union or communion with one another, the husband and wife as well as family members are mirroring in a visible, even if limited, way, the manner in which God relates to us. Their heads tell them that God and Jesus love and care for them in a total, unconditional, everlasting fashion; but their hearts and whole being probably best grasp this truth by experiencing profound love and care for their spouses or children and realizing that such love and care is but a reflection of God and Christ's far greater and more perfect love and care for us.



## Introduction

Over the past few years, many publications have examined marriage from both a speculative and a pastoral point of view.<sup>1</sup> What is offered here are a few fundamental concepts about matrimonial theology and spirituality, not an exhaustive treatment of those double approaches to marital life.

The framework that is followed is based upon the four general tasks of the family—which Pope John Paul II has emphasized—that flowed from the

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1. The following is not an exhaustive list of current books on marriage, but rather a sampling of the types of publications that are available: *Marriage among Christians*, by James Tunstead Burtchaell (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1977); *For Better for Worse*, by James Tunstead Burtchaell (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); *Marriage Studies I: Reflections in Canon Law and Theology*, Thomas P. Doyle, OP, ed. (Toledo: Canon Law Society of America, 1980); *Marriage Studies III: Reflections in Canon Law and Theology*, Thomas P. Doyle, OP, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1985); *Feast of Love: Pope John Paul II on Human Intimacy*, by Mary G. Durkin (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983); *Embodied in Love: Sacramental Spirituality and Sexual Intimacy*, by Charles A. Gallagher, et al. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983); *Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage and Family in the Modern World*, by Richard M. Hogan and John M. LeVoir (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985); *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis*, by Pope John Paul II (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1981); *Theology of Christian Marriage*, by Walter Kapser (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984); *Secular Marriage, Christian Commitment*, by Michael G. Lawler (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985); *Marriage in Canon Law*, by Laidislas Orsy, SJ (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1986); *Christian Marriage*, by David M. Thomas (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983); *Man and Woman, He Made Them*, by Jean Vanier (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); *Marrying Well: Stages on the Journey of Christian Marriage*, by Evelyn Eaton and James D. Whitehead (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1984). See also, *Pastoral Letter on the Sacrament of Matrimony*, by Most Rev. Raymond G. Hunthausen, Archbishop of Seattle (Elizabeth, N.J.: Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center, 1982).

1980 Synod of Bishops.<sup>2</sup> Under each of those functions or purposes, several related thoughts will be suggested and, then, the major or standard sources of revelation will be cited for support of those thoughts. The fountains of truth referred to and cited within quotation marks are the authentic teaching of our tradition; the inspired Word of God; the Church's liturgical celebration of marriage; and the testimony of the faithful, represented in this instance by the comments of a sacramental couple from New York.

The four general tasks, functions, or purposes of marriage and the family can be categorized as: (1) forming a community of persons; (2) serving life; (3) participating in society's development; and (4) sharing in the Church's life and mission.

## **Forming a Community of Persons**

There is a parallel or, better, a mutuality of symbolism between the Most Holy Trinity and the sacramentally united couple. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are absolutely different and diverse persons, but they are bonded as one through the perfect love that each divine person has for each other person of the Trinity. God, in creating every woman and man as a totally distinct and different person, nevertheless, wishes those who enter marriage to become one in body and spirit, likewise bonded by an absolute love for each other. The divine love of the Trinity is unconditional, committed, irrevocable, and exclusive or faithful; God's plan is that human marital love will be the same. In both cases, unity emerges out of diversity through love.

Similarly, both divine and marital unity through love are sacramental—symbols of something more—and possess a unique, mysterious power within

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2. *On the Family*, Part 3, nos. 17-64.

them. The Trinity symbolizes what married life can and should be; conversely, married life can mirror, even though only in faintly reflective fashion, the love and unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity's love, however, has also reached out to us through creation and, later, through redemption. The same bonding love extends to human beings as creatures and, after fall and forgiveness, in old and new covenants of closeness. God made a marriage with humankind from the beginning and restored that union, especially through Jesus' coming, dying, and rising, as well as through his continued presence in the Church.

Once again, God's absolute, unconditional, irrevocable, and faithful love—now manifested through creation and Christ's saving life, as well as through a Church that will last until the end of time and reaches out to all—models or symbolizes what marriage can or should be. In parallel fashion, the love between spouses; between parents and children; between members of the extended family; as well as between healthy members of the family and those who are in any kind of need—from the sick or disabled young to the deteriorating and vulnerable elderly—those loves reflect and lead us to the Trinity's love, which is so vastly greater.

God's plan intends for marriage to be a community of persons, linked as one by love.

#### **a) OUR AUTHENTIC TRADITION**

"The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives.

"... Without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons."<sup>3</sup>

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3. Ibid., no. 18.

"By virtue of the covenant of married life, the man and woman 'are no longer two but one flesh' and they are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.

"... [I]n the Lord Christ, God takes up this human need, confirms it, purifies it and elevates it, leading it to perfection through the sacrament of matrimony: the Holy Spirit, who is poured out in the sacramental celebration, offers Christian couples the gift of a new communion of love that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the Church the indivisible mystical body of the Lord Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

God wills and communicates "the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for [us] and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church."<sup>5</sup>

## **b) GOD'S INSPIRED WORD**

"For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church."<sup>6</sup>

"Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. . . .

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth. . . . On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you."<sup>7</sup>

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4. Ibid., no. 19.

5. Ibid., no. 20.

6. Eph 5:29-32.

7. Jn 14:11,1-17,20.

"In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an expiation for our sins."<sup>8</sup>

### c) THE WEDDING LITURGY

"You created us in love to share your divine life. We see this high destiny in the love of husband and wife, which bears the imprint of your own divine love. Love is our origin; love is one constant calling; love is our fulfillment in heaven. The love of man and woman is made holy in the sacrament of marriage and becomes the mirror of your everlasting love."<sup>9</sup>

### d) A SACRAMENTAL COUPLE

"Through the power of their mutual love, each spouse calls the other to be more fully the complete person God created. Rather than losing their individuality, each spouse becomes more clearly defined as a distinct person. Paradoxically, it is by dying to self that each finds himself or herself. The fear is that one will be absorbed into the other's personality and become totally dependent upon him or her. But in a properly balanced marriage, there is a wholesome interdependence that strengthens each person psychologically and spiritually.

"The personal dignity of each spouse is nurtured and honored as the couple judges actions in all parts of their lives according to what is best for their relationship. As a sacramental couple, they weigh these decisions in light of how they help build the Body of Christ, the Church. Just as they are to be one in flesh, they are to strive to be of one will and one spirit by

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8. 1 Jn 14:9-10.

9. *Rite of Marriage*, Preface for Nuptial Mass, no. 117.

developing a workable process for making couple-decisions, a process that considers the feelings and thoughts of each spouse and is immersed in prayer.

"In the sacrament of matrimony, husband and wife make a commitment to each other, which is permanent, total, exclusive, faithful, and unbreakable. They know the whole Church is supporting them in prayer and action. Bolstered by their awareness of the sincerity and solemnity of this mutual commitment, each partner has the courage to risk even greater intimacy. The experience of being so totally loved by another person is but a shadow of God's love for us.

"The best way for a man to be a good father is to truly love his wife. The best way to be a good mother is for a woman to truly love her husband. This rich conjugal love becomes a wholesome environment in which the children thrive. They feel secure, wanted, and joy-filled, as well as predisposed to learning how to grow up and become lovers too. When children see selfishness, discord, tension, and conflict between their parents, their whole world is threatened. Husbands and wives will, at times, fight and are called to forgive each other, reconcile, and seek healing. In doing this, they teach their children, the Church, and the world how to restore peace."

## **Serving Life**

The infinite love between members of the Holy Trinity does not stop there, but overflows in a generative way to create and sustain the universe and all living beings in this world of ours. In mysterious and wondrous fashion, God shares that generative, loving, and creative power with men and women.

That miraculous event, however, is not an end, but a beginning—the start of a journey through life toward eternity. Like the God who not only creates, but sustains life, wives and husbands must not only

be open to the transmission of life and responsibly bring forth new human life, but also responsibly bring up the children who are the Trinity's unique gift to them. No work of father or mother exceeds in importance the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual formation of their daughters and sons.

Just as the Trinity's love reaches out in a creative manner, so, too, Christian parents and their children must extend loving arms to other persons—especially the young—who are in need. To adopt or to foster children, to serve as a "Big Brother" or "Big Sister" of those with special burdens is to make God's loving care present to them through us.

Infertile and elderly couples, while never or no longer serving life by the begetting of children, still contribute to that function by nurturing growth in each other and in others, through loving service, in a variety of ways.

## **a) OUR AUTHENTIC TRADITION**

God calls a man and a woman "to a special sharing in his love and in his power as creator and Father through their free and responsible cooperation in transmitting the gift of human life. . . .

"Thus, the fundamental task of the family is to serve life . . . [through] transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person.

". . . The fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children . . . : It is enlarged and enriched by all those fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life which the father and the mother are called to hand on to their children, and through the children to the Church and to the world."<sup>10</sup>

"Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate

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10. *On the Family*, no. 28.

their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children."<sup>11</sup>

"[T]he mentality which honors women more for their work outside the home than for their work within the family must be overcome."<sup>12</sup>

"[E]fforts must be made to restore socially the conviction that the place and task of the father in and for the family is of unique and irreplaceable importance."<sup>13</sup>

"Christian families, recognizing with faith all human beings as children of the the same heavenly Father, will respond generously to the children of other families, giving them support and love not as outsiders but as members of the one family of God's children."<sup>14</sup>

## **b) GOD'S INSPIRED WORD**

"God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.

"God blessed them, saying: 'Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth. . . .' God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good."<sup>15</sup>

"Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds!"<sup>16</sup>

"But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . .

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11. "Declaration on Christian Education," in *Vatican Council II*, no. 3.

12. *On the Family*, no. 23.

13. *Ibid.*, no. 25.

14. *Ibid.*, no. 41.

15. Gn 1:27-31.

16. Lk 12:24.



"And he gave some of us as apostles . . . others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ, so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery. . . . Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ. . . ."17

"If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works is dead."18

### c) THE WEDDING LITURGY

"Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?"19

Lord, grant that as they begin to live this  
sacrament they may share with each  
other the gifts of your love  
and become one in heart and mind  
as witnesses to your presence in their  
marriage.

Help them to create a home together  
(and give them children to be formed by  
the gospel  
to have a place in your family).

Give your blessing to N., your daughter,

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17. Eph 4:7,11-16.

18. Jas 2:15-17.

19. *Rite of Marriage*, Questions before Consent, no. 24.

so that she may be a good wife (and mother),  
caring for the home,  
faithful in love for her husband,  
generous and kind.

Give your blessings to N., your son,  
so that he may be a faithful husband  
(and a good father).

Father, grant that as they come together to  
your table on earth,  
so they may one day have the joy of sharing  
your feast in heaven.<sup>20</sup>

#### **d) A SACRAMENTAL COUPLE**

"Matrimonial spirituality is very sexual in its practice. One basic purpose for sexual intercourse in marriage is the procreation of children. By being open to God's plan, the couple can be full partners in enlarging and enriching the Body of Christ. When they are thus completely open to God's plan in this area of their relationship, that spills over into all other areas and greatly assists them in becoming one.

"Both the husband and the wife must accept and practice their responsibility in being procreators. They both have an obligation to be fully informed about the Church's teaching and then practice the necessary self-discipline. However, they must also be aware of their responsibility to use sexual intercourse as a means of building their oneness and thus bringing new life to their relationship. They will discover that, as their couple relationship grows, each of them will individually grow closer to God, which is their vocation in the sacrament of matrimony.

"Many couples who use Natural Family Planning have experienced periods of abstinence from

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20. Ibid., Nuptial Blessing, no. 120.

sexual intercourse. They report how they added activities of a nongenital nature which brought them much romantic excitement and enthusiasm. It is important to realize that it is not uncommon in marriage, for reasons of health or extended separation, that couples must forego intercourse. During those times, they are called to develop acceptable alternatives to express their sexual love for each other. That is what the Church means by 'chastity'—the appropriate use of our sexuality. At such times, we use this form of spiritual energy to defend our love against the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness.

"Through the power of the sacrament of matrimony, married couples are able to lead lives of holiness. Their holiness evolves from the sanctifying of the ordinary daily events of their lives. Matrimonial spirituality is marked by the call to denial of self and acceptance of suffering as a normal part of living as a Catholic Christian. Suffering is a reality for all people. In matrimony, each spouse can be a compassionate, consoling listener, and thus make the response to the suffering become a way to grow closer together and closer to God."

## **Participating in Society's Development**

The well-being of society depends upon the well-being of families, which make up this society, because the family is the fundamental unit or primary cell of every society. Obviously, new citizens come forth constantly from the home to keep that society alive and growing. But the family also serves as the initial training ground of future adult citizens in those human virtues or values essential for the survival and flourishing of any society.

The current deterioration of so many family relationships within the United States underscores, in negative fashion, the truth of these statements.

However, the family is also a "domestic," "small-scale," "little," or "miniature" church. As such, it does or should radiate not only human virtues, but likewise gospel values, including and particularly a preferential option for the poor or those in any need. That concern for the needy will express itself first of all in direct service efforts—of various types—to alleviate people's immediate burdens. Second, it will also manifest itself in astute social justice advocacy to bring about long-term solutions by eliminating the causes of poverty, through appropriate governmental legislation or institutional action.

In these as in other undertakings, Christian couples receive through the sacrament of matrimony sufficient divine grace, providing them with the wisdom and power necessary to fulfill all their responsibilities.

#### **a) OUR AUTHENTIC TRADITION**

"[T]he family is the first and vital cell of society. . . .

"It is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself."<sup>21</sup>

"Families therefore, either singly or in association, can and should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially in favor of the poor or at any rate for the benefit of all people and situations that cannot be reached by the public authorities' welfare organization."<sup>22</sup>

"The social role of families is called upon to find expression also in the form of political intervention: Families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the state not only do not

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21. *On the Family*, no. 42.

22. *Ibid.*, no. 44.

offend, but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family."<sup>23</sup>

"[T]he sacrament [of matrimony] gives to Christian couples and parents a power and a commitment to live their vocation as lay people and therefore to 'seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God.'"<sup>24</sup>

"The Christian family is thus called upon to offer everyone a witness of generous and disinterested dedication to social matters through a 'preferential option' for the poor and disadvantaged."<sup>25</sup>

## **b) GOD'S INSPIRED WORD**

"'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. . . . [W]hatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'"<sup>26</sup>

"They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day

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23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., no. 47.

25. Ibid.

26. Mt 25:34-40.

the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."<sup>27</sup>

"Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. . . . Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all."<sup>28</sup>

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."<sup>29</sup>

### c) THE WEDDING LITURGY

God the eternal Father keep you in love with  
each other,  
so that the peace of Christ may stay with you  
and be always in your home.

May (your children bless you,  
your friends console you  
and all live in peace with you.

May you always bear witness to the love of  
God in this world  
so that the afflicted and the needy  
will find in you generous friends,  
and welcome you into the joys of heaven.<sup>30</sup>

### d) A SACRAMENTAL COUPLE

"Catholic couples living in the sacrament of matrimony are radical and countercultural. In a contempo-

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27. Acts 2:42-47.

28. Rom 12:9-18.

29. 2 Cor 12:9.

30. *Rite of Marriage*, Blessing at the End of Mass, no. 125.

rary culture that puts a supreme value on 'expressive individualism,' the matrimonied couple is an anomaly. They are not self-centered. They are other-centered. Other-centeredness is a gospel value. The fundamental call to matrimonied couples is to die to self, to make one's spouse the first priority, and thus to risk rejection and move toward oneness in a truly intimate relationship.

"Married couples soon discover they have entered into a new world of total sharing, which ranges from their most interior personal knowledge to the mundane activities of each day. It might be that the wife is alarmed to have him walk into the bathroom while she is showering or he gets upset when she uses his razor to shave her legs. Or, suddenly, both their paychecks go into a common pot and the other spouse now has a voice in how 'my' money is spent. It is a powerful lesson of how rights must yield to responsibilities and duties.

"Having learned, as a married couple, the importance of sharing in their own home, they must now reach out to those outside the family. This is the next level of dying to self and demands that they make themselves more aware of the needs of others and then respond within their means. That could mean, financially, by sacrificial giving or tithing. It could mean by contributing used clothing or household appliances to a parish Human Development Committee instead of having a garage sale and keeping the money for their own purposes. It could mean being involved actively in the Pro-Life Movement.

"In a world marked by consumerism and greed, a married couple can choose voluntary poverty and remove themselves from an anxious preoccupation with job promotions and salary increases for the sake of acquiring more things. They can chose instead to emphasize family relationships and a simplified life style. The nonverbal witness of their actions will be a sign to others that it is possible to choose how we want to live."

## Sharing in the Church's Life and Mission

By God's unique marriage with humanity—through Jesus' paschal or Easter mystery of coming into this world, suffering, and dying on it out of love for all, and rising to bring us divine life both here and hereafter—a new covenant between Creator and creature has been established. This heavenly covenant, made possible by Christ's saving action, is reflected in the human covenant between husband and wife.

In carrying out his work of salvation, Jesus Christ served and serves as a prophet, a priest, and a king. The married couple and the family that grows from their mutual love, in parallel fashion, are meant to fulfill prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles or functions while living out a Christian marriage.

As *prophets* who speak in the name of God and proclaim God's message, married couples, above all, must have faith in the gospel and be eager to share that faith with others. They will be the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith and are urged to be also the best of teachers.<sup>31</sup> This requires ongoing efforts to renew and deepen themselves spiritually so that they may proclaim the good news to those within their home and beyond its walls.

These tasks will, likewise, demand generosity and courage—qualities always needed by prophets and evangelists in the Church's history. Only courageous and generous parents can maintain great interior serenity when their young children reject or do not practice the faith, or, on the other hand, decide to follow a temporary or permanent missionary career far away from home.

As *priests* who mediate between God and other human beings, married couples are called through this sacrament of matrimony to live holy lives that

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31. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, Final Blessing, no. 105.



will radiate Christ's love to all those who come in contact with them.

Such marital holiness will center on the Eucharist, but it will also find expression and nourishment in the other sacraments, especially reconciliation and penance, as well as in private, family, and liturgical prayer.

As *kings*, spouses, with their families, have the task of building a better Church and world through their loving service of others. This, of course, includes members of our faith community but also embraces sisters and brothers outside our spiritual family since true love can discover the face of Christ in everyone, especially those who are poor or weak, who suffer or are unjustly treated.

## a) OUR AUTHENTIC TRADITION

"It is thus in the love between husband and wife and between members of the family—a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness—that the Christian family's participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and his Church finds expression and realization."<sup>32</sup>

"[T]he Christian family fulfills its prophetic role by welcoming and announcing the Word of God: It thus becomes more and more each day a believing and evangelizing community. . . .

"Only in faith can they discover and admire with joyful gratitude the dignity to which God has deigned to raise marriage and the family, making them a sign and meeting place of the loving covenant between God and man, between Jesus Christ and his bride, the Church."<sup>33</sup>

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32. *On the Family*, no. 50.

33. *Ibid.*, no. 51. Sections 51-54 speak very concretely to the practical meaning of the prophetic role for married couples.

"By means of the sacrament of marriage, in which it is rooted and from which it draws its nourishment, the Christian family is continuously vivified by the Lord Jesus and called and engaged by him in a dialogue with God through the sacraments, through the offering of one's life and through prayer.

"This is the priestly role which the Christian family can and ought to exercise in intimate communion with the whole Church through the daily realities of married and family life."<sup>34</sup>

"[T]he Christian family is inspired and guided by the new law of the Spirit and, in intimate communion with the Church, the kingly people, it is called to exercise its 'service' of love toward God and toward its fellow human beings.

"Inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, the Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God."<sup>35</sup>

## **b) GOD'S INSPIRED WORD**

"As the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and recall the everlasting covenant that I have established between God and all living beings—all mortal creatures that are on earth."<sup>36</sup>

"Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine, You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation."<sup>37</sup>

"For I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and

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34. Ibid., no. 55. Sections 55-62, likewise, treat specific details of the priestly function of married couples.

35. Ibid., nos. 63-64.

36. Gn 9:16.

37. Ex 19:5-6.

bring you back to your own land. . . . I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God."<sup>38</sup>

"Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said: 'Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you that from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which will be given up for you; do this in memory of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.'"<sup>39</sup>

"But you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were 'no people' but now you are God's people; you 'had not received mercy' but now you have received mercy."<sup>40</sup>

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. . . .

"This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church."<sup>41</sup>

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."<sup>42</sup>

"[Y]ou will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth."<sup>43</sup>

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38. Ex 37:21-28.

39. Lk 22:17-20.

40. 1 Pt 2:9-10.

41. Eph 5:25-27,32.

42. Mk 16:15.

43. Acts 1:8.

"He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."<sup>44</sup>

"Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."<sup>45</sup>

"Again, amen I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>46</sup>

"You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. . . .

"But, as it is, my kingdom is not here."<sup>47</sup>

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the holy Spirit; whoever serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by others."<sup>48</sup>

### c) THE WEDDING LITURGY

Holy Father, Creator of the universe,  
maker of man and woman in your own  
likeness,  
source of blessing for married life,  
we humbly pray to you for this woman  
who today is united with her husband in this  
sacrament of marriage.

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44. Acts 18:26.

45. 1 Pt 2:4-5.

46. Mt 18:19-20.

47. Jn 18:37,36.

48. Rom 15:17-18.

May your fullest blessing come upon her and  
her husband  
so that they may together rejoice in your gift,  
of married love  
(and enrich your Church with their children).

Lord, may they both praise you when they  
are happy and turn to you in  
their sorrows.

May they be glad that you help them in their  
work  
and know that you are with them in their  
need.

May they pray to you in the community of  
the Church,  
and be your witnesses in the world.

May they reach old age in the company of  
their friends,  
and come at last to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>49</sup>

#### **d) A SACRAMENTAL COUPLE**

"The fundamental responsibility of a husband is to reveal to his wife God's image and likeness within her. That is, not to solve her problems or offer good advice, but rather to listen in prayer and then tell her how she reveals the kingdom of God to him. She must do the same for him. It is so simple. When we do this, grace flows abundantly and we slip-slide into becoming one, which is our sacramental, gospel call. As St. Paul writes, in Ephesians 5:21:33, the world will see how much Jesus loves the Church by observing how this husband loves his wife.

"A common problem in marriages is that one spouse wants to grow spiritually and the other one is not at all interested. As sacramental couples, each of us is responsible for our own spiritual growth, and

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49. *Rite of Marriage*, Nuptial Blessing, no. 121.

responsible to be supportive for our spouse's spiritual growth.

"Each married couple has a responsibility to help the Church come to a greater understanding of the meaning of the sacrament of matrimony as a vehicle for communicating what the Church is all about. This can be done by reflecting on the grace-filled experience of their own sacramental life and by the public sharing of their story in their parish. This will call for courage because usually there are suffering and mistakes to be shared. But through sharing, we grow as a Church.

"One direct way to be filled with Jesus Christ is to receive more frequently the Eucharist. A married couple will find the Eucharist to be an unequalled, rich source of nourishment for their marriage. Eucharist is the symbol of our oneness in the Body of Christ and thus is a parallel to the symbol of oneness expressed by a sacramental couple. Eucharist is also a powerful gift from God to help us become more one. There is a divine, transcendent analogy between this act of spiritual intercourse and a married couple's act of physical intercourse."

## **Alienation and Reconciliation**

Many people who are preparing for marriage carry with them the burden of alienation. They may, for example, be children of divorced parents, possess a conscious or unconscious mistrust or resentment of any authority person, disagree with the Church's teachings on sexuality, or experience great fear and anger because of a premarital pregnancy.

Those persons who are seriously alienated in any way will have great difficulty in sustaining or deepening the marital relationship. Those, on the other hand, who have worked through such ruptures, whose wounds have been healed, even if scars may remain, who have experienced some type of reconcili-

ation, are in a better position to sustain and deepen the marital relationship.

While the word *alienation* by itself may not suggest intense personal pain to many people, a brief description of its practical meaning or application will quickly reveal to all one of our current culture's greatest challenges.

Asking a group of people to reflect silently for a moment upon someone who, in the recent past, has exercised power over them in a presumably inappropriate manner, and then inviting these persons to share how they felt or feel about the incident will surface these typical responses: I felt "angry," "used," "powerless," "humiliated," "run over," "degraded," "distanced."

Those real experiences teach us that alienation results in a distancing between persons, which can cause or lead to pain, emptiness, sorrow, and even open hostility. *Reconciliation*, on the contrary, produces a closeness between people, which can cause or lead to pleasure, the fullness of peace, joy, and a loving concern for one another or others.

In this section, three major alienations in contemporary society—from God, from others, from ourselves—are discussed.

## **ALIENATION FROM GOD**

This type of alienation may arise from our own sinfulness or from confusion over bad things that have happened to us or to people we care about.

### **Sinfulness and Alienation**

The Church, following the example and teaching of Christ, presents lofty and demanding ideals for its members. For example, the goals of chastity and fidelity, as well as trust and discipline, fit into those categories. But, as Jesus warned his closest followers—and us: "Be on guard, and pray that you may

not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."<sup>50</sup> In that weakness, we may make a poor choice, yield to the immediate, and fail to follow our conscience. We call that choice, yielding, or failure, sin—in essence, the conscious and willing disregard of God's voice within us.

The guilt that flows from sin can be devastating. Unacknowledged and unexpiated, it can burrow deep inside, permeate the core of our being, and destroy our interior peace or serenity.

The Church, however, never proposes Christian idealism without simultaneously proclaiming Christian compassion. It never tires of repeating that our God is "gracious and merciful . . . slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment."<sup>51</sup> It never stops recalling the deeds and words of Jesus, who welcomed sinners and ate with them, and who said there will be "more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent."<sup>52</sup> It never ceases to urge and offer the virtue and sacrament of penance as a powerful instrument, giving God's peace to burdened sinners.

## Disasters and Alienation

There seems to be a tendency for us immediately to raise issues or doubts about God when bad things happen to people, but not as swiftly to praise or credit God when good things occur in people's lives. However inconsistent this inclination may be, the fact remains that personal, local, national, or global tragedies frequently spur people to pose questions such as, "How could God let that happen?" or "Why did God take him?" or "If God is so good, can you explain

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50. Mt 26:41.

51. J1 2:13.

52. Lk 15:1-10.



why she has cancer?" Moreover, the anger frequently connected with death or any deep personal loss can become directed at God. The combination of unanswered questions and unresolved anger may cause, within the individual, a condition of alienation or distancing from the Lord.

Simplistic solutions or swift answers to these profound issues generally are not very helpful. Those concerns touch upon the very ultimate mysteries of life and death, God and us—mysteries never fully to be grasped or comprehended here on earth, but only in the world yet to come.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, passages from Scripture, the teaching of the Church, and the example of suffering Christians can prove valuable in dealing with such disasters.

Perhaps, the overarching biblical text pertinent here is from Paul's letter to the Romans: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."<sup>54</sup> God is always mysteriously, providentially watching over and directing our lives, turning tragedies, and even our own mistakes into something good for us.

Paul also tells us by his example and teaching that troubles of this sort have a value in building up the Church: "Now I rejoice in my suffering for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church. . . ."<sup>55</sup>

The apostle, finally, reassures us, again by his example and words, that we will be able to endure and overcome any difficulty: "Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he

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53. For a profound treatment of this issue, see *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, apostolic letter of John Paul II (Washington, D.C.: USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1984). For a popular discussion of the matter, see *Healing in the Catholic Church*, by Joseph M. Champlin (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1985).

54. Rom 8:28.

55. Col 1:24.

said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell within me."<sup>56</sup>

The Church's official teaching reminds us, among other things, that our human burdens, setbacks, and hardships, united with the sufferings of Christ on the cross, are subsequently transformed and enable us to share in Jesus' work of saving the world.<sup>57</sup>

Suffering Christians, beginning with the Master himself, sustain us with insight and courage by their example and comments. Jesus does not explain the reasons for sufferings but simply tells us to expect them as his disciples: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."<sup>58</sup> That command to "follow me" naturally takes us to Calvary and Good Friday.

Pope John XXIII, eight decades old, afflicted with cancer, and burdened with leadership of the Church, is another Christian person who, by example and words, encourages us in our own troubles. Despite his weakened condition, that pope pushed himself to the limit one day and left the Vatican for an important ceremony that was finally to seal reconciliation between the Holy See and the Italian government. Back home, he felt drained of all strength, but recovered enough to watch television coverage of the event. He commented, then, on the contrast between the pope at the celebration and the pope confined to his rooms:

A few hours ago, I was being feted and complimented, and now I'm here alone with my pain. But that's all right. The first duty of a pope is to pray and suffer. . . . Out there the

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56. 2 Cor 12:8-9.

57. *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, art. 26.

58. Lk 9:23.

world exalts me, while here the Lord rivets me to this bed.

Several weeks later, about to be anointed with the sacrament of the sick, Pope John XXIII sat up in bed, clothed with surplice and a white stole. Even at that moment he preached and taught:

The secret of my ministry is in that crucifix you see opposite my bed. It's there so that I can see it in my first waking moment and before going to sleep. It's there, also, so that I can talk to it during the long evening hours. Look at it, see it as I see it. Those open arms have been the program of my pontificate: they say that Christ died for all, for all. No one is excluded from his love, from his forgiveness.<sup>59</sup>

## ALIENATION FROM OTHERS

Probably, the most commonly experienced alienations are those big and little ruptures with people who have crossed our paths and form forever a small or large part of our lives. Given the wounded human condition and the imperfect world in which we dwell, none of us can ever totally escape from these distancings during a lifetime. If we reconcile, the gap closes and our hearts heal; if we do not reconcile, the chasm remains and our spirit lacks the profound, perfect peace we all crave.

These brief suggestions should help prevent some alienations and foster needed reconciliations:

***Grow in sincere compassion; guard against excessive competition.*** Like Jesus, who, the gospels tell us, was often moved with compassion or pity,

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59. *Pope John XXIII*, by Peter Hebblethwaite (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985), pp. 494, 501.

we are called as Christians to enter into solidarity with others, to rejoice with those who rejoice, to weep with those who weep.<sup>60</sup> Yet, in our culture, fierce competition, rather than deep compassion, dominates our lives. Our self-esteem generally depends upon negative or positive comparisons or distinctions made between ourselves and others. Are we more or less this or that depends upon those with whom we are compared or those with whom we compete. This excessively, but all pervasive, competitive spirit can block us from being sincerely compassionate.<sup>61</sup>

***Recognize with joy others' gifts.*** The world can be viewed as a massive pie capable, however, of being cut into only a limited number of pieces. Consequently, if you have a piece of it, a particular gift or talent, I necessarily possess less. This can make me sad, jealous, or envious; conversely, your loss or failure may inwardly please me. More appropriately, the world can be viewed as a clear night sky brilliant with stars. Every star adds to the beauty of the night. Your gifts, in this approach, are like stars enhancing the sky, as do mine. That philosophy of gifts aids in reducing the competitive/comparative drive and in promoting a spirit of compassion.

***Praise others frequently and specifically.*** Contemporary management or leadership manuals encourage executives to practice "positive reinforcement" and "one-minute praises."<sup>62</sup> These systems of regular encouragement and thoughtful praise promote better working procedures in the business

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60. See, for example, Mt 9:36; Mt 14:14; Mk 8:2; Mt 9:27; Mk 1:41; Lk 7:13.

61. For a discussion of this point, see *Compassion*, by Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison and Henri J. M. Nouwen (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1982), esp. pp. 16-20.

62. *In Search of Excellence*, by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. (New York: Warner Books, 1984), pp. 70-71; *The One-Minute Manager*, by Kenneth Blanchard, Ph.D., and Spencer Johnson, M.D. (New York: Berkley Books, 1985), pp. 36-45.

world, but they easily can and should be fostered in all our relationships. The key elements of this reinforcement and praising are doing so immediately, acting with sincerity, being very specific, and making the affirmations at unpredictable and intermittent moments.

***Accept others.*** Probably the essential requirement for harmonious relationships—between spouses, family members, friends, colleagues—is the willingness and ability to accept people as they are, not as they should be nor as we want them to be.

***Forgive and ask for forgiveness.*** Both Jesus on the cross and Stephen while being stoned asked God to forgive their assailants.<sup>63</sup> Christ was also very explicit: "If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."<sup>64</sup>

All of us understand how difficult it is to forgive or to seek forgiveness. Saying, "I am sorry" or "I apologize" or, in the most profound fashion, "Please forgive me" are not attitudes and words that come easily to our hearts and lips. But without them, we never taste true peace.

The example of a Minneapolis woman may encourage those struggling to forgive others who have hurt them. A few years ago, her husband was shot and killed by three hitchhikers he had picked up.

At the funeral in the Lutheran Church, one son, a ministerial student, asked for their friends' and society's forgiveness of the three who murdered their father and husband. Later in the evening, after the burial, the wife and mother wanted to tell the three unapprehended young men that they were welcome in her home, if this was the kind of love they could understand and need. She finally wrote this "Open

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63. Lk 24:34; Acts 8:20.

64. Mt 6:15.

## Letter to the Three Boys Who Murdered My Husband<sup>65</sup>:

During the past three days, my grief and desolation have been eased and comforted by the love and faith of so many wonderful friends and relatives. But, in the midst of all this, and especially in the quiet moments, my thoughts keep turning to you three. You may feel that you are men, but to me you are just boys—like my own sons—and I wonder to whom you are turning for comfort and strength and reassurance.

I suppose I will never know what motivated your actions that night, but if the shots were fired out of sheer panic, my heart aches for you, and I wish there were only some way I could help you in what you must be suffering now.

If hate made you pull that trigger, I can only pray that you can come to know the love of God that fills the heart and leaves no room for hate. If you were under the influence of drugs, please, for my sake and your own, don't waste your lives, too. Get help and rid yourselves of that stuff.

Please, if you see this, find a church some place where you can be alone; then read this again. Know that God forgives you and that my family and I forgive you—then go out and make something worthwhile out of the rest of your lives.

God keep and bless you.<sup>65</sup>

## ALIENATION FROM OURSELVES

Not caring deeply about ourselves seems to be both one of original sin's central impacts upon us and the root cause of much destructive behavior in our lives.

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65. *A Path to Peace: Prayer, Fasting and Works of Charity*, by Joseph M. Champlin (Los Angeles: Franciscan Communications, 1983).

One priest found this to be true in his extensive work with youngsters caught up in the web of drug abuse or narcotics addiction and teenage girls pregnant out of wedlock.

These youth knew a great deal about the properties and effects of drugs, but regardless, they abused drugs as their way of coping with their own poor self-images or life's problems.

The teenage women followed a similar pattern. For example, Winnie was overweight and unhappy with herself. She desperately wanted to be loved and accepted. Any young man could hand her a line that was good enough, only to leave her feeling terribly lonely the morning after. For her, birth control was out of the question; it only affirmed that part of herself she hated most.<sup>66</sup>

This deep-seated inclination to view ourselves poorly, with the subsequent hurtful behavior patterns that follow, as a consequence, finds fertile grounds in contemporary society with high divorce rates and abandoned children.

Some very young children in troubled marriages tend to blame themselves for the conflict between their parents. The published personal account of such a girl and woman's tragic early years illustrates this point.

As a small child, she told her Cuddly Duddly, "It's all my fault my daddy and mommy don't love each other any more." During fierce battles between her parents prior to the breakup, she would reflect that the trouble surely was "all her fault" and that "she won't be the cause of their troubles any more." After the divorce, the little girl judged that the fact that mother and father never came to visit or take her back "could be only because she was bad.

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66. "Finding Solutions to Teen Sexual Activity," by Most Rev. Howard J. Hubbard, in the *Albany Evangelist* (January 8, 1987).

Mommy and Daddy had sent her away because she was a bad girl."<sup>67</sup>

The poor self-esteem engendered by these relections created within her deep fears: fear of loss and fear of punishment; fear of being left, cut off; fear of being an extension of nothing; fear of being dead, killed, abandoned, alone, and unwanted.<sup>68</sup>

These dreadful fears gradually led her to two destructive activities: lying and promiscuity. She lied to avoid punishment and to be able to do what she wanted. "Elaborate lies, she found, sounded more truthful." She later also began experimenting sexually. She enjoyed the attention, never remembering from the past being hugged or touched or told she was loved. "Those sexual experiences gave me something to be good at, or at least that's what I told myself. And I felt sort of loved. Stupid, isn't it?"<sup>69</sup>

Those who are adopted can easily experience a similar questioning of their lovableness. While adoptive parents make a most praiseworthy loving choice from the beginning to adopt, and usually surround adopted ones with love, the adopted girl or boy, woman or man may sometimes ponder, "Who were my real parents?" "Why did they abandon me?" "How is it I was rejected by them?"

While these are perhaps more dramatic instances of situations or people involving poor self-esteem, the following few questions generally will reveal to most of us that we do not care deeply enough about ourselves and that our self-image needs strengthening:

- How well do I take compliments?
- Do I have a tendency to find fault with myself or my work? When I or my accomplishment

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67. *Forgive Me*, by Cathleen Crowell Webb and Marie Chaplan (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1985), pp. 13, 20, 22, 30, 32.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 37, 48.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 62, 74-75.



is praised, do I point to something imperfect in me or the product?

- Is there a double standard within me? To qualify for a virtue, must there be a perfect performance on my part? To place a vice after my name, is one lapse, one poor choice, one mistake, one sin sufficient?
- Am I comfortable allowing people to love me? Or must I always be the lover, the giver, the doer?
- Do I tend to be excessively competitive or ambitious rather than genuinely compassionate and concerned?
- How often am I anxiously seeking reassurances or support from others?
- Am I preoccupied with pleasing others or fearful someone will not like me or what I am doing?

Recognizing this deeply rooted inclination to see ourselves poorly is actually the first step to healing that wound within us. The ultimate source or remedy for a poor self-image is to comprehend how God loves us in an unconditional way; to believe that we are unique creatures of this loving Maker; to grasp just how many gifts Yahweh has given us; and to accept Jesus' saving, forgiving, and sanctifying grace in our lives.

A religious priest, active in the preaching and healing ministry, suggests that those suffering significantly with negative self-concepts spend five minutes each day reflecting on scriptural passages that remind us of how unique we are in God's sight. For those who feel hurt or troubled by another's words or actions, he recommends that they also allo-

cate another daily five minutes pondering God's unique love for that person.<sup>70</sup>

The following phrases from the prophet Isaiah can be especially helpful in that type of meditation. God speaks to the prophet and to us in these words: "Fear not, I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. You are precious in my eyes and glorious . . . I love you."<sup>71</sup>

Aware of these contemporary alienations from God, others, and ourselves—understanding their root causes and knowing practical ways for bringing about needed reconciliations—is a major function of the proximate preparation for marriage. It must be carried on first and primarily in the family, at home, but it also should happen in the other settings and circumstances.

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70. *The Healing Power of the Sacraments*, by Jim McManus, CSSR (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1984), pp. 42, 118-121.

71. Is 43:1,4.

## Conclusion

The *Code of Canon Law* expresses the hope that married couples, by being faithful to their nuptial covenant, may "day by day come to lead holier and fuller lives in their families."<sup>72</sup> In doing so they will also be recognizing and freely accepting their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the kingdom of God in the married state.<sup>73</sup> Better marriages of this type mean better families in our society today; better families, in turn, mean better communities, a better Church, and ultimately a better world.

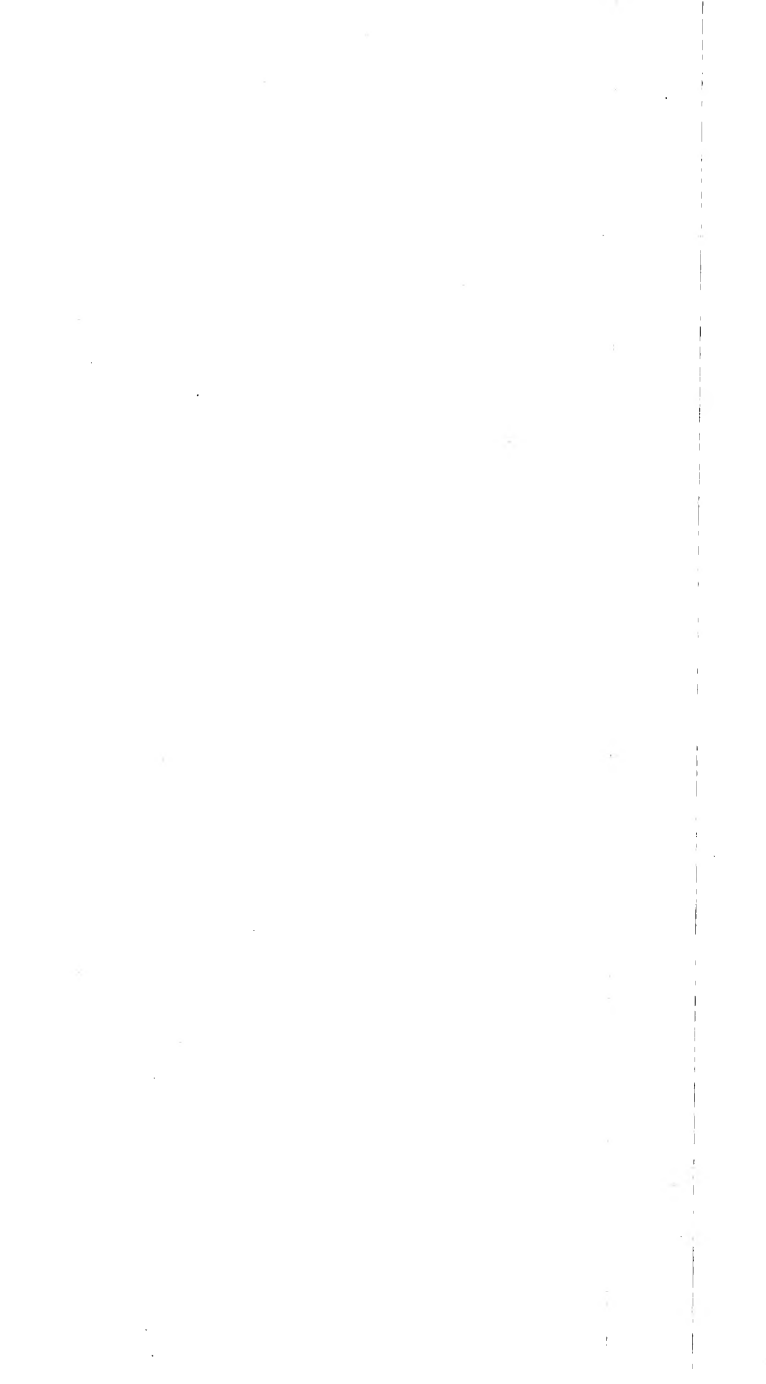
To strengthen husbands and wives, and in this fashion to fulfill these conjugal and family obligations, Jesus, Savior of the world and Spouse of the Church, comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that, penetrated by the spirit of Christ, they may love each other with the perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By filling their whole lives with faith, hope, and charity, that spirit enables them to advance in perfection, sanctify one another, and thus contribute jointly to the glory of God.

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72. *Code of Canon Law*, c. 1063.

73. *On the Family*, no. 51.





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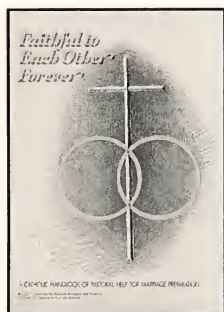
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***Our Future Together*** discusses available marriage preparation programs, interreligious marriages, cohabitation, chastity, finances, the role of each partner, alienation, and reconciliation. Designed for engaged couples. Pub. No. 351-5, 72 pp.

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***Making Marriage Work*** discusses various aspects of the marital relationship, abortion, sterility, infertility, divorce, annulments, enrichment programs, finances, and differing roles. Pub. No. 355-8, 48 pp.



The above books are excerpted from *Faithful to Each Other Forever: A Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation*. (Pub. No. 252-7, 164 pp.) This book is designed by the NCCB Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices to aid those involved in marriage preparation ministry.

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Publication Number 353-1  
Office for Publishing and Promotion Services  
United States Catholic Conference  
Washington, D.C.

ISBN 1-55586-353-1